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THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

This article has been contributed by staff from the National Museum of Australia.

The vision of a National Museum of Australia emerged from the work of the Pigott Committee in 1975 and has since captured the imagination of a wide cross-section of Australians. The vision is not of a conventional museum - but of a place that will reflect what it means to be Australian, emphasising the environments and cultures which have shaped us as a people.

The Museum will consist of a series of pavilions, in harmony with the landscape, and linked by covered walkways. Visitors will enjoy the diversity of the experiences offered - from indoor dioramas to operating machinery, from outdoor displays to live performances. They will be challenged by high-tech displays with which they can interact; they will participate in 'living history' with museum staff and volunteers.

Visitors to the Museum will learn how the continent was formed and how its particular flora and fauna evolved. The displays will illustrate the history and culture of Australia's original inhabitants - the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders - and show the changes that have occurred since 1788. They will also show the nature of the Australian environment and how it has been affected by human occupation.

Throughout the displays the relationship between these three major themes will be explored and revealed.

This is Australia

Visitors to the Museum will begin their visit in a gallery called 'This is Australia' which will survey what the Museum has to offer. It will contain highlights of the National Historical Collection - objects of exceptional interest or significance in our nation's history.

The span of history will be encompassed - from the great marine dinosaur Kronosaurus, to the preserved heart of Australia's most famous race horse Phar Lap; from Australia II's original Boxing Kangaroo battle flag to the Peace Bus of the 1980s peace movement.

Visitors will be able to enjoy views over the lake as they move along a covered walkway to the other pavilions and facilities. An historic tramway will link this area with the distant parts of the site.

From this introductory pavilion, visitors will have a choice of possible routes through outdoor

displays and a series of galleries containing thematic exhibitions.

The Australian People

The Gallery of the Australian People will demonstrate the make-up of the Australian community of today. It will deal with the economic, social and political forces which brought migrants to Australia, and show how they responded to their new cultural and physical environment. The exhibitions will explore the possible origins of Australia's Aboriginals, and recount the story of the First Fleet. Historical figures will be identified including those whose efforts contributed to the political growth of the developing nation. Looking to the future, demographic projections will generate images of Australian society in the years ahead.

The Gallery of Aboriginal Australia

The story of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, from their origins in the distant past to the present day, will be told in the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia.

It will focus on their cultural diversity, their relationship to the land and its plants and animals, and their interaction with settlers after 1788. The range of lifestyles of Aboriginal people in today's Australia will be revealed, while a replica of a Torres Strait village will provide the backdrop to displays of the life and culture of these Island people.

Aboriginal inventiveness and achievements in art, literature and environmental management will be presented in informative displays. Visitors will see the 'Embassy' tent as it stood before Parliament House in 1972, the focal point for the political aspirations of Aboriginal communities across Australia at the time.

Australians at home and work

This gallery will show that the Australian way of life has been built on the necessity for work, in the home and at the workplace. A reconstructed country printing shop will highlight the issues of workers' health and safety, and the often long and irregular hours of work in small businesses. The growth of the trade unions and their struggle for improved working conditions will be told in a series of innovative exhibitions.

The impact of technological change not only on the rural economy but also on the social and political fabric of country life will be explored in a working display of Australian shearing through the years.

Australian aspirations for home ownership, the growth of suburbia and the 'quarter acre block' will be examined and related to the changing structure of the Australian family and the often arduous and under-valued nature of women's work.

Museum of Oz

Children will love the Museum of Oz, designed to entertain and challenge young Australians as they learn about their country. Older Australians too will be able to test their knowledge with interactive displays, performance events and highly innovative displays.

For young visitors, the Museum of Oz will open up another world. They will enter a country town of the 1930s, shopping at a general store and trying the old-fashioned money-sling system. They will glimpse school life as it was in a one-room wooden school building with its old fashioned desks, slates and squeaking pencils. They will meet a stockman in his camp who will yarn to them about the bush environment. The Aboriginal custodians of western Arnhem Land history will tell the story of the Mimi Caves, and how the Mimi and the Aboriginal people lived together in the

Dreaming.

Gallery of the Australian environment

Flat-bottomed boats will introduce the 'Millewa Journey', a voyage of discovery through time in a unique Australian environment. They will follow the history of the River Murray (known to Aboriginal people as Millewa) from the distant past when giant marsupials roamed the riverine plains, through the period of Aboriginal occupation prior to European settlement, and on to the period when the paddle steamers made the river a vital link in the nation's economic growth.

Visitors will learn of the effect of European settlement on the fragile environment, and the problems that have resulted. Issues of soil conservation, irrigation, salinity and pests will be explored along with wildlife and forest conservation. Outside the gallery, kangaroos, wallabies, parakeets and other native species will roam freely in an attractive natural landscape. Nature trails will lead to the edge of the lake where a range of waterfowl can be seen.

Australians at play

The national preoccupation with sport will be illustrated in the Gallery of Australians at Play. There will be displays about Australians' involvement in a range of sports such as cricket, football, boxing, lawn bowls, tennis, netball, yachting, surfing and horse racing. A bar and refreshment room will be close by, and diversions such as wood-chopping, sheep dog trails and boomerang throwing competitions will be presented. Visitors will see how gambling has often been a significant part of Australian leisure time activity and will have the chance to take the kip and toss the pennies in a reconstructed two-up den.

Informal and individual forms of leisure, especially in the outdoors, will be features, as well as popular entertainments like the movies, the circus, the theatre, festivals and parades, home entertainments, music and crafts, not to forget the social barbecue by the backyard swimming pool.

Collections and notable acquisitions

Over almost fifty years a substantial collection of objects has been acquired as part of this major undertaking. Notable amongst these are the National Historical Collection formerly stored in the Institute of Anatomy and items of national significance such as the 12 metre yacht Australia II. In recent months the National Museum accepted the Wedgwood Bowl on behalf of the Australian people to commemorate the Bicentenary and to symbolise Wedgwood's historic links with Australia. The inside surface of the Bowl has a border of wattle and the coats of arms of each State, Territory and the Commonwealth in 24 carat gold. The words 'To commemorate the Bicentenary of Australia 1788-1988' encircle the base. A wave motif surrounds the words, symbolising Australia's ties with Britain and countries around the world. This gift has symbolic importance for all Australians in the motifs featured in its decoration, as well as the occasion of its presentation to the Museum.

PS Enterprise

From September 1988 a Murray River paddle steamer will be operating as a working exhibit on Lake Burley Griffin. Constructed in 1878 this vessel has been carefully restored to working condition, as it was in 1910 when it was in use as a barge towing vessel. It will be interpreted to the public at major events. **Enterprise** will play a major part in the National Museum's Bicentennial activities. Purchased by the National Museum in 1984, **Enterprise** is an outstanding example of what was once a fleet of over 300 paddle steamers that served the needs of the colonies of South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. **Enterprise** is now the second-oldest paddle steamer in Australia and, as one of the oldest steam vessels still afloat anywhere, is a

vessel of world significance.

Exhibitions and the Yarramundi Visitor Centre

The Yarramundi Visitor Centre opened on the site for the National Museum in September 1986 and contains a theatrette where videos and films are screened, and exhibition area and plans and models illustrating the development of the major project. Since its opening the Visitor Centre has mounted two exhibitions incorporating the three major themes of the National Museum, the history of the Aboriginal people, the history of Australian people since 1788 and their interaction with the environment.

The first exhibition **On the Horizon** gave visitors a glimpse of the planning for this important national project. It also gave some idea of the scope of the Museum's collection and the way in which objects - both early and contemporary - can be used to help us understand the lives and the societies of the people who made and used them. Some of the exhibits displayed included a dugout canoe from Borroloola (NT), a Ferrier Wool Press, Aboriginal carvings and paintings and a 1950s Pinball Machine, which was very popular with children and nostalgic adults.

The second exhibition by the National Museum of Australia titled **Survival**, is intended to give visitors some insight into Australia's cultural diversity. Australia is an ancient continent populated for at least 50,000 years. Although the environment has always changed, and at times dramatically, the last 200 years have seen the greatest change. How have Aboriginal people survived? People from many other countries also have made Australia their home. How difficult has it been? How have they maintained and expressed their cultural and political traditions? And what of our native flora and fauna? How have they survived, and what part do they now play in the Australian landscape?

These issues are explored in a dramatic and engaging display which signals the innovative approach to be taken in larger exhibitions of the future.

Future of the major project

Consideration of construction of the Museum complex at the Yarramundi site has been deferred for five years with a view to its opening by 2001 as a fitting celebration of the centenary of Australia's federation. The Museum will be developing arrangements in the interim with State-based institutions to exhibit elements of the National Collection.

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